

Good Word Schedule
The Book of Mark
July, August, September, 2024

1. **The Beginning of the Gospel**—*June 29–July 5*
2. **A Day in the Ministry of Jesus**—*July 6-12*
3. **Controversies**—*July 13-19*
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11. **Taken and Tried**—*September 7-13*
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13. **The Risen Lord**—*September 21-27*

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The Book of Mark

General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 3rd Quarter of 2024. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

The study this quarter is the Gospel book of Mark. Though little can be known about the author from the text itself, if the author is John Mark as early church tradition contends, then several pieces of information can be fit together from the rest of the New Testament. Our study this quarter will address some of these aspects of authorship, and how they play a role in the composition of this meaningful addition to the Christian scriptures and story of Jesus.

Although this is the shortest of the four gospels in the protestant Bible, each story it tells is usually longer than the other gospels. Jesus in Mark is a powerful wonder-working, miracle-making, demon-exorcizing teacher, and is in fact, the very Son of God. The story is told in a high-impact way, led from passage to passage (pericope to pericope) by frequent use of the word *immediately*: "Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat..." (Mark 1:20).

The ending of Mark contains some textual challenges, but however we accept (or not) the last section of Mark in our modern Bibles (16:9-20), we're still left with a desire to make sure the story of Jesus is told again and again. The Son of God still has power to change lives, cast out demons, calm storms in our lives, feed the hungry, and give good news—the Gospel of the Kingdom!—to those in need of hope.

This high-impact but short-duration story of Jesus is intended for people who are not Jews, who did not have experience with Hebrew or Aramaic language, or background in the Old Testament scriptures or Israelite law and later Rabbinic interpretations and oral tradition. For that reason, it resonates with many people today reading the story of Jesus for the first time.

The author of this Sabbath School quarterly is Dr. Tom Shepherd, a godly man, a devout student of scripture, my PhD academic advisor, and friend. His own doctoral dissertation, available through Andrews University Dissertation Series of publications, explores the various "sandwich stories" in Mark's gospel. I'm honored to contribute this study guide in concert with Dr. Shepherd's years of experience in this powerful narrative about the life of Jesus.

May the God who gave John the Revelation illumine your study by His Spirit as the consummation of Christ's atoning work draws near!

Brant Berglin
June 16, 2024

Opening Question

What do people mean when they say, “it’s the Gospel truth”?

Introduction

We begin our study this quarter of the Biblical “gospel” according to Mark, and the first couple days focus on John Mark as a historical character in the Christian scriptures. Modern historical critical scholars believe they have discounted John Mark as author of this gospel, but many of their arguments are built around speculation and an overemphasis on Mark’s author (or implied author) as ignorant of Palestinian geography and Judaism. The earliest writings after the disciples who speak about Mark’s authorship ascribe it to Peter who shared his works through John Mark.

Some early church leader testimony is presented here:

Papias of Hierapolis (60-130AD) – “And the elder [*perhaps John*] used to say this, Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said and done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had followed him, but later on, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.”

Irenaeus (130-200AD) – “Matthew composed his gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul proclaimed the gospel in Rome and founded the community. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed on his preaching to us in written form.”

Justin Martyr (appx. 150AD) – “It is said that he [Jesus] changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and it is written in his memoirs that he changed the names of others, two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’....”

Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD) – “And so great a joy of light shone upon the minds of the hearers of Peter that they were not satisfied with merely a single hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine gospel, but with all sorts of entreaties they besought Mark, who was a follower of Peter and whose gospel is extant, to leave behind with them in writing a record of the teaching passed on to them orally; and they did not cease until they had prevailed upon the man and so became responsible for the Scripture for reading in the churches.”

To what degree does the original authorship of this book matter today? Can we judge the value of Mark based on the text alone, or is apostolic originality vital to both faith and confirmation of the text’s validity?

Who was Mark?

We learn some things about the potential author of this book from Acts and the N.T. Epistles: he is known as John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas, and companion of both him and Paul for a time. Peter calls him “my son,” which is usually assumed to be a spiritual relationship, not physical/biological.

Mark 1:1-3

Unlike the other Synoptic gospels (Matthew and Luke), Mark skips the birth narratives of Jesus, the much-beloved Christmas story. There are no angels, shepherds, or stable with manger. Mark tells us nothing about Jesus’ childhood events (see Luke for those), and leaves out the stories of Elisabeth and Zechariah. Instead, Mark begins with their son John, and a quote from the Old Testament immediately identifying the forerunner of Jesus.

Why would Mark leave out so many details of the first 30 years of Jesus’ life?

Most scholars note Mark’s audience as a Greco-Roman or at least non-Jew. What purpose does this quotation from the Old Testament serve? How might it prime a Gentile readership and audience for the story of Jesus?

Mark 1:4-8

The location, message and character of John the Baptist deserve some attention. He is noted as having a leather belt and wearing a camel’s hair. 2 Kings 1:8 says that Elijah the prophet was similarly adorned, but was “a hairy man.” The NIV reads he was wearing a “garment of hair” rather than just being “hairy,” perhaps to agree with the gospels.

How are Elijah and John similar? Jesus will later call John the Baptist a new Elijah; what did Jesus mean by that?

What was John’s message? How would this message fly with people today? Have we been called to announce this, or is this a message for someone else to give?

Mark 1:9-13

Jesus comes to John for baptism; but if baptism was an outward sign of repentance and spiritual cleansing from sin, this challenges some other claims of Jesus’ sinlessness.

Why would Jesus need to be baptized, if He was the sinless One? What purpose does it serve? How does the heavenly voice give meaning to this moment and to those hearing?

The fact that Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit where He would be surrounded by the “wild beasts” and was tempted by Satan for 40 days seems to allude to the Old Testament experience of Israel in the wilderness. Only Mark mentions that angels were ministering to Him.

Closing Comments

Mark's gospel begins the way the book will continue: fast-paced action, one story after another, and Jesus quickly becoming the center of the story. The beginning of Jesus' ministry is emphasized by the ceremonial washing of Israel by immersion, and then Jesus begins his own ministry. His three-fold message: 1) the "time is fulfilled," 2) the "Kingdom is here," and 3) "repent and believe the good news" from the backdrop to the rest of Jesus' ministry.

Opening Question

What is the most spontaneous thing you can remember doing?

Introduction

Our lesson this week takes on Mark 1:16-45. These verses cover a range of topics including the call of the first disciples, and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He preaches, prays, heals, casts out demons (a highlighted and oft-repeated miracle in Mark's gospel), and speaks with authority.

Mark 1:16-20

Jesus calls his disciples and they immediately leave their nets, and they follow Him. Perhaps they had heard his initial preaching about repentance, and the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This would have stoked much messianic fervor in their hearts.

Jesus' call of the first disciples seems rather abrupt, and their response somewhat spontaneous. Would you have immediately left everything behind to follow? Why or why not? What do you glean from the passage that warrants their unhesitant response?

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus is described in vss. 21-22 as having authority and not like the scribes. We do not have the exact words of Jesus' audience, but we have much of the written code of the 1st-century Jews contained in the Talmud and the Mishna. Jesus was different, because rather than relying on his own loopholes around the Torah and prophetic writings, Jesus applied the law with personal force to everyday matters, and the unregenerate heart (as seen especially in the Gospel of Matthew chs. 5-7).

When Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath and casts out the unclean spirit (vss. 23-27), Jesus commands the Spirit not to continue speaking when it begins to identify Jesus as the "Holy One of God." Throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus constantly asks people to keep silent about him. This is called "the messianic secret," and although present in the other Synoptic gospels, it is far more prevalent in Mark.

Why would Jesus ask people not to speak about Him publicly, or announce His miracles broadly? In spite of Jesus' desire to keep his work more private, vs. 28 shows that was impossible.

Mark 1:29-38

We learn that Peter is married, and that his mother-in-law is sick with a fever. Jesus is urged to come, and with just a touch—taking her by the hand—the fever leaves her. Throughout the book of Mark, Jesus touches people, even those who should defile him according to Jewish

purity laws. Rather than her sickness being contagious, Jesus' health is contagious. People catch health everywhere He goes. And when she feels better, she immediately begins to serve Jesus.

Apparently, it did not take long for others to hear about Jesus' power; and throughout the long Sabbath and into the evening, Jesus heals all kinds of diseases, casts out demons, and tells them to be quiet! Mark's fast beginning also quickly establishes Jesus' power. He has power over both the Spirit world and the biological world of humanity.

What made 1st century Israel so liable to demon possession? Do we have trouble with this spiritual matter today? Or should we just diagnose demon possession as mental health ailments and let the psychiatry, social work and psychology deal with it rather than spiritual leaders?

Jesus' example (vss. 35-38) of quiet prayer is noteworthy. Jesus spent time with the crowds, but also recharged alone. Perhaps He was equal parts introvert and extrovert. But both of these need time with God alone!

Mark 1:39-45

The healing of the leprous man, probably a strain of Hansen's disease, again involves touch and orders not to say anything. Touch was an intentional act by Jesus, and it would have made anyone else unclean. But not Jesus; He is pictured here as the very source of health.

What effect does proper and caring touch have on people? What happens if we lack touch as children, adolescents, middle-aged, or the elderly? Who are the people today we're *afraid* to approach because we consider them "unclean"? How might an appropriate, loving touch bring healing to them?

Closing Comments

Jesus' ministry begins to grow, so much so that he was prevented from coming into the places that might have needed Him most—the populated areas. They still need Him today!

Opening Question

Have you ever been involved in something contentious or scandalous?

Introduction

This week's lesson covers the next stories in Mark chapters 2 and 3. The stories are again punctuated with the word "immediately" which drives the stories forward. Jesus heals, but more than that, He also forgives sin. If this wasn't enough to raise controversy, Jesus then asks a tax collector to become His student as well! But the controversies only begin here. Jesus becomes a target in these chapters!

Mark 2:1-12

One of my favorite stories in the gospels, a few points are worth noting here: first, Jesus does not heal this man because of his own faith, but that of others. Secondly, Jesus does not physically heal him first, but forgives his sins. Of course, this raises the ire of the Pharisees who do not believe anyone but God can forgive sins. But that is exactly the point here; as the "son of God," Jesus has every right and the power to forgive the broken law!

What kind of effort did it take this man's friends to bring Him to Jesus for healing? Would you do the same for a friend?

What is harder for Jesus: to heal this man of paralysis, or to forgive his sins? Which is more obvious that Jesus has actually accomplished what He says? What ultimately costs Jesus more?

Mark 2:13-17

Jesus calls Levi, the "son of Alphaeus." He was a tax collector, sending Jewish money to Rome. Of course, he would be hated by his countrymen who called him a traitor. And apparently Levi knew other tax collectors, and introduces them to Jesus. Vs. 15 says they were following Jesus, too!

How would Jesus' disciples have reacted to having a former tax collector traveling with them and learning from Jesus? What kind of tensions would arise?

Mark 2:18-22

Jesus offers some advice on fasting; the disciples did not fast while Jesus was among them, but Jesus promised they would once He was gone.

What is the spiritual value of fasting? What other values can it add physically, mentally, or time-wise? How can it hurt a person and who should be wary of it?

Jesus' teaching on new wineskins and patched clothing is often misunderstood, but appears to be speaking about the need for flexible hearts to receive His "new" teachings!

Mark 2:23(-28 through 3:1)-3:6

Jesus and his disciples are accused to breaking the Jewish law regarding the Sabbath. However, there was no specific Deuteronomic or Levitical law prohibiting what they were doing. There was, on the other hand, plenty of Rabbinic “tradition of the elders” codified in the Talmud/Mishna outlawing this kind of reaping and threshing. But Jesus defends it with two examples from the Old Testament. Then he proceeds to heal a man on the Sabbath, knowing that the Pharisees were watching to “catch him” in a sinful act.

How do Jesus’ examples defend His actions on the Sabbath? How is Christ’s Lordship of the Sabbath to be understood today? Was He abrogating resting on the day memorializing creation? Or something else?

What example does Jesus leave us for keeping the Sabbath as a day of delight, both for ourselves and others? Is it a day to harm or give life?

Mark 3:7-12

Word about Jesus extends beyond Judea, and this will bear fruit later in both His own ministry and in that of the disciples. Again, we see “touch” mentioned in vs. 10, unclean spirits in vs. 11, and the Messianic secret in vs. 12, all major themes in this book!

Mark 3:13-19

Jesus calls the 12 He chose, and “appointed” them. The King James says “ordained,” which affects our understanding of how God chooses pastors. However, the original word here is simply “to do” or “to make” (Greek: *poieo*), and not some kind of ritual laying on of hands with earthly authority. We see later in Mark that Jesus does not give the 12 this kind of Gentile power. Rather the 12 were sent to preach about the kingdom, but to have “authority over demons.” Many today believe that authority is for preaching as well, but this is not the case here.

How can we best understand the idea of “appointing” only men here while we do not see Jesus calling any women, yet the end of Mark has women commissioned to announce the resurrection before the men receive the news?

Mark 3:20-30

Jesus was perceived as crazy/mad/insane by those who heard him, and even his family suggested that he had lost His senses. From this, scribes began accusing Him of having a demon himself.

How did Jesus’ continuous exorcisms in Mark demonstrate that it was not by the hand of Satan that Jesus could do such miracles? How does Jesus say this would be counter-productive?

Mark 3:31-35

Who were Jesus' real family? Verses 34-35 would have made his family even more concerned because He appeared to be abandoning them and instead choosing a new family. For Jesus, faith is stronger than blood! These verses conclude the sandwich story started in vs. 20.

If the family of Jesus is filled with those who do His Father's will, how do I enter it if keeping His law is so difficult, and the morality is so elevated?

Closing Comments

These pericopes (stories) all demonstrate the real beginning of controversies that will conclude Mark's gospel with Jesus' death at the hands of the Pharisees, scribes and others. But even that event will show Jesus' power and sonship of the living God!

Opening Question

Why do people enjoy riddles?

Introduction

This week's study examines the Parables in Mark 4. In many ways, this chapter is parallel to Matthew 13. Jesus was not unlike the Rabbis of His day in using parables. But for Jesus, the parable was the vehicle to communicate the reality and characteristics of the Kingdom, not just reinforce Rabbinic traditions.

Mark 4:1-9, 14-20

The parable of the Sower is the quintessential simile: "the Kingdom of Heaven is like..." But this story also provides us a means of understanding how parables function; Jesus gives us an interpretation. While many scholars argue for one main point for parables, this one appears to have several facets that contribute to a final conclusion: everyone has a different type of receptivity to the gospel message.

Can we change our heart-soil ourselves? Are our more Calvinist-leaning friends correct when they argue that different heart-types are chosen and fixed by God?

Mark 4:10-13

This is a challenging segment between the Parable of the Sower and its interpretation. Jesus explains why uses parables and defends it by quoting Isaiah. But it is also problematic on the surface. It seems Jesus uses parables so some people will never understand, perhaps like telling a difficult riddle to a simple-minded or slow-thinking person. The harder the riddle, but more likely they will be to be stumped and never catch on.

Is Jesus trying to keep people from understanding the Kingdom of Heaven? Why would using Parables be a way of sifting his hearers between those possessing spiritual initiative and true interest, and those merely seeking to twist His words and condemn Him?

Mark 4:21-23

The teaching about a lamp is about more than a lamp... right?

What is Jesus comparing a lamp to exactly? How does this fit with Jesus' words about people being the light of the world and His own disciples' role in sharing the kingdom teachings? How does this teaching amplify Jesus' use of parables with "hidden" meanings?

Mark 4:24-25

Jesus speaks about measuring here, likening the weighing of grain, flour, spices or other dry goods with our general generosity.

What is God's standard of measurement toward us? And how does He decide whom to be generous toward?

Mark 4:26-29

This parable about the growing grain also teaches us about maturity. At each stage, though not yet complete, the grain is adequate for its growth. It is not fair to expect grain immediately, thus we learn about discipleship here.

How does this parable help us maintain perspective when considering our own spiritual growth in stages while also looking forward to full maturity? Will I know when I've become spiritually "ripe"?

Mark 4:30-34

The mustard seed here is called the "smallest of all seeds," yet that is not scientifically correct; neither is the contention that it becomes the largest plant. But the truth is that the kingdom which starts small in the world grows to become the largest, rivaling even the Babylonian kingdom which God compared to a large tree giving shade to the birds of the air.

Can this parable apply not just to the kingdom itself, but to our own personal experience, where the growth begins with just a seed in our lives, but becomes all-pervasive?

Closing Comments

The section ends with Jesus explaining everything to the disciples privately. This suggests that those who truly wanted to know the answer to the riddles could get it just by pressing forward to Jesus and asking. He was ready to fill those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

Opening Question

Who is more in need of immediate care: a person with a cold, or someone suffering a heart stroke?

Introduction

Several “boat scenes” in Mark’s gospel reveal misunderstandings of the disciples and give Jesus ample opportunity to teach and rebuke. The first is found at the end of Mark 4. Chapter 5 continues the exorcism stories, and concludes with another Markan “sandwich story” about two daughters healed by Jesus’ touch and another Messianic secret “hushing.” Chapter 6 includes yet another “sandwich story,” explaining the death of John the Baptist.

Mark 4:35-41

When the storm on the sea arises, Jesus is sleeping. The disciples believe themselves about to die, but Jesus rebukes both them and the wind/waves.

What misunderstanding drives the disciples to cry out to Jesus? Why is His rebuke so direct? Is it not right to be scared when it appears your life is about to end?

Has it seemed at times in your life when you needed Him most that God was asleep or absent? How did you manage through those times? Did you exercise faith or doubt?

Mark 5:1-20

Without question, this is the most significant exorcism story in all of the gospels, both for drama and length. The region on the other side of the sea of Galilee borders the Greco-Roman Decapolis, that is, the region of the 10 Cities. It was largely gentile, and its influence could be felt even in Jewish villages and regions such as Jesus and the disciples enter. When the man comes out of the tomb toward Jesus, we are struck by the incongruence. The man both runs forward but the voice(s?) coming from his mouth seem to want nothing to do with Jesus. Such is the reality of the split-personality of demon possession. Personal autonomy is taken captive by the unclean spirit.

Why does Jesus, after casting out the demons from the man, prevent him from following? Why would Jesus turn away a prospective disciple? On what mission does He send him?

Why do the townspeople implore Jesus to leave? How might their reaction to Jesus play into His request of the healed man to stay behind?

Mark 5:21-23

Verses 21-43 form yet another sandwich story. The first segment (or bread) pictures Jairus coming to Jesus to ask for help for his little “daughter,” who is nearing death. Her condition is acute and critical. She needs immediate attention. Jesus wastes no time in coming with the man.

Why does this synagogue official ask Jesus to “lay his hands on” his little daughter? Did he know that Jesus’ touch was powerful?

If you are a parent, have you ever prayed for your children in some meaningful way? What did you ask for? Did God answer in a similar way as Jesus does here, providing his presence, as they journey back?

Mark 4:24-34

The story of Jairus’ sick daughter is interrupted by a woman who touches Jesus’ garment. She has suffered vaginal bleeding for 12 years straight. This would have rendered her unclean, nearly like leprosy, and made life miserably inconvenient on the best of days, and exhaustingly painful at the worst. She may have been cut off from her husband, if she had one, over this condition, as intimacy would have been prohibited by Jewish law. Verse 26 says she had “suffered many things at the hands of many physicians” suggesting some abusive treatment, and at the same time spent everything she had, but only got worse. But her touch called power from Jesus! She is healed and gets to tell her story.

Why does Jesus stop the crowd hurrying to Jairus’ house for this woman? What does Jesus call her after He commends her faith, and how does this term compare to the outer story? Jesus tells her that her faith has “saved her,” but doesn’t that imply more than simply physical healing?

Mark 4:35-43

Jairus receives the sad news while Jesus is talking with the chronic case patient that his daughter had died. But Jesus reminds him to have faith. Jesus says she’s only asleep!

How old is this little girl, the “daughter” of Jairus? How are the two parts of this sandwich story related, and what words or ideas or themes tie them together?

Does the story of Jesus raising Jairus’ daughter give you hope for the future, that death is not permanent for those who believe? Here, Jairus is asked to have faith in Jesus for the raising of His daughter; if you have children, do you trust God with them?

Could you have kept this event secret?

Jesus cares about both the chronic and the acute cases from which we suffer. And should the acute case end in death, He can fix that also. That is reason to rejoice!

Mark 6:1-6

We read that people in Jesus' hometown could not be healed (6:5).

From what did their unbelief arise? What role does faith actually play in spiritual and physical healing? Is it right to assume that if we are *not* healed, that lack of faith is *always* the reason?

Mark 6:7-33

We have yet another sandwich story placing the sending out of the 12 disciples and their return outside of the death of John the Immerser. The middle story is really a flashback, as the John's death had already happened in the story-time of Mark's gospel, but Mark waits to tell it until now when it appears John has risen from the dead.

An oft-asked question about John is why didn't Jesus do something about his condition in prison, and prevent John's death? But a deeper look at this story forces some more significant questions: how is John's death a warning and encouragement to disciples of Jesus in their own mission to the world? How is John a forerunner of Jesus Himself and His own death for similar reasons?

Mark 6:34-52

Two more miracles close out this lesson: the feeding of the 5,000+ and another boat misunderstanding. As Jesus returns to the boat walking on the water, the disciples think they see a ghost. But Jesus is real, just above physics. He does not need to violate natural laws; He is also God and able to use them for his own purposes. Even if Jesus is not using His divinity, He is allowing His Father to do so, and the result is the same!

Closing Comments

The miracles around the lake lead to greater faith in Jesus as the wonder-working Son of God, but there are more foreshadowings of rejection and maybe even death, like John.

Opening Question

Does Jesus care what we eat?

Introduction

One of the more challenging passages in Mark's gospel is chapter 7's discussion about unclean hands and foods. But perhaps we ask the wrong questions when we read it. This

Mark 7:1-23

Read through this passage, maybe a couple times. As you do, ask yourself what is the main issue raised and what is Jesus' response to it? Without question, Jesus is addressing food, ritual purity and the tradition of the elders. The Jews in Jesus' day believed that touching food in the market touched by gentiles would defile them spiritually, and especially so if they ate food with ritual impurity.

How does Jesus answer to the Pharisees specifically address their concern about “unwashed hands”? From where does true spiritual impurity originate, according to Jesus? In what way does Jesus “declare all foods clean” within the context of ritual hand-washing? Does Jesus do away with Levitical distinctions between clean and unclean animals here, or is there something else at issue?

Mark 7:24-30

In today's modern culture, this story makes Jesus guilty of racism. He utters an epithet at a foreigner's expense. But unlike today's culture, the woman refuses to take offense. Rather, she even accepts Jesus' supposed critique. She is willing to be called a “little dog” if it will lead to a few scraps from God's table. She has no intention of keeping anything good from the Jews (the children).

What commendation does Jesus give this woman and how is she both a rebuke to and example for the disciples? How is she an example for us today?

Mark 7:31-37

Jesus heals a deaf/mute man, and the people are amazed. We again see touch, this time with the “healing properties” of human saliva applied, anointing the man's tongue. Once again, the Messianic Secret makes a cameo.

Have you ever seen the videos on YouTube of people having cochlear implants installed and turned on? When they hear family member's voices for the first time, they often burst into tears. What do you imagine this man did after being healed?

Mark 8:1-10

Another feeding story, this time in the region of the Decapolis. The audience is likely not mainly Jewish. The leftover baskets of food are only 7-fold this time, but the number seems significant since it is counted.

Some skeptical scholars contend that Mark is trying to fill space and is merely confused telling the same story of the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 again. Certainly, there are similarities, but what in the context here suggests this one is likely different?

Mark 8:11-21

Embedded in this section is another boat-story and misunderstanding of the disciples. This time, Jesus warns them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Just as leaven represents sin and the bread made with it (Jesus said, "I am the bread of heaven"), so the disciples were to avoid the errors and the "sins" contained in their empty philosophy and motivations. The pure word of the Kingdom was to be their "bread"

Closing Comments

Jesus makes his way across the lake and back several times, and each time, the disciples learn more about Jesus, the Kingdom, and the messages they are to take to the world when Jesus is gone.

Opening Question

What makes someone a good student?

Introduction

Many commentators will divide Mark into two sections: the first half ends at 8:30 or perhaps 8:38, and the 2nd half ends at 16:8 (or 20). The first half answers the question, “who is Jesus”? This half shows the path to identity ending at Caesarea Philippi where Peter announces the identity of Jesus. The second half asks, “why will Jesus die?” and shows the path to the cross and the passion of Jesus.

This lesson examines several teachings on discipleship. Jesus will predict his death, and then reveal to the disciples the cost of following Him. They do not seem ready at this point and are confused about what a real disciple looks like.

Mark 8:22-30

Jesus heals a blind man, but it doesn't work the first time Jesus tries. As Dr. Shepherd notes in the lesson, this cannot be because of any lack of power on Jesus' part. He knows how and has ample connection to the life-giving power of heaven. Yet there is a lesson here for the disciples, as part of chs. 8-10 on discipleship.

How would you react to having a partial healing? What would full healing feel like compared to the partial? What lesson do the disciples learn about discipleship through the metaphor of “sight” being only partial? What is *their* spiritual vision like?

What identity does Peter give to Jesus compared with the rest of those queried? Why is this an “inspired” answer?

Mark 8:31-38

We often think of the disciples hearing Jesus speak about taking of a cross in a figurative sense: “oh, that is just my cross to bear” when asked why I drive a Toyota instead of a Ferrari. But Jesus here teaches that His disciples must be willing to suffer the worst of Roman tortures—the crucifix and the ignominy that accompanies this cursed and humiliating death.

Peter was certainly willing the night of Jesus' arrest to fight to the death; but when Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested, Peter ran. Why is death in battle considered honorable and even sought-after by some, while death by execution is to be avoided at all costs? What is the real cost of following Jesus illuminated by Jesus' statements regarding being ashamed of Him?

Mark 9:1-13

Many skeptics believe that Jesus' words in 9:1 were never fulfilled because such people believe them to apply to the 2nd coming. But in Mark, as in Matthew, Jesus promise that some will not taste death is followed immediately by the story of the transfiguration. This event plays an expanding role to Jesus' baptism where the same Heavenly voice is heard again.

What role to Elijah and Moses play in meeting to speak with Jesus? Why are these two men significant in Israel's history, and what happens to them if Jesus fails in his mission?

Once again, we see discipleship at its worst as Peter tries to make three "tabernacles" for the transfigured men in front of him. If the word here for "tabernacle" is the same as the word used for the Hebrew temple, what is Peter really offering to make?

Mark 9:14-29

This story of the unclean spirit in the young man is nearly as sensational as the Gadarene/Gerasene Demoniac story earlier. But here, discipleship is again highlighted. The disciples are unable to cast it out! This time, Jesus replies (vs. 19) with what appears to be exasperation about their unbelief. After casting out the deaf/mute demon, He teaches the disciples the power of prayer for this "type."

Are there truly different types or families of demonic spirits? Perhaps we're uncomfortable speaking about the topic, but Jesus certainly was not. When the reality of spiritual and demonic bondage is in front of us, we're better off admitting the problem and seeking the power of God. How does our spiritual connection give us power in these instances?

Mark 9:30-41

Once again, Messianic Secret, and then Jesus forecasts His death. But instead of listening, the disciples argue about Who is the greatest. We seem to be the same today, always striving for superiority in games, work-accolades, academics, driving, or just being "right" in every-day arguments.

What lesson does Jesus teach when He places a child in the middle of the disciples? How were children valued in that culture, and why does Jesus use one as an example here?

Mark 9:42-50

The conclusion of Mark 9 has some textual challenges where some verses appear to be added to the later manuscripts of Mark. But either way, vs. 48 includes the words, and the teaching is still clear here: If you want to enter life, it's better to go in missing a limb if that body part causes you to sin. This seems to be playing on the ideas of the Pharisees that sin reside in the body, and caused the bad behavior. If that were so, Jesus argues, better cut the limb off, and still get the rest of you into heaven. But perhaps there is more. What do we value most, that which is

closest to us, that prevents full discipleship? What part of my life should be cut off for the sake of the Kingdom?

What would you find most difficult to part with if Jesus asked you to relinquish it for the sake of the Kingdom?

Closing Comments

Discipleship is a life-time experience. But Jesus is patient with us, even if we're exasperating. May God provide the grace we need to grow daily and learn the lessons that equip us for ministry and His eternal Kingdom.

Opening Question

If you could request any gift from God, what might it be?

Introduction

As this lesson completes chapter 10, we also complete the three major chapters on discipleship in Mark. We learn more about Jesus' death, and also Jesus' approach to lordly authority and power among disciples. As a church, we have much to learn about this truth from Jesus, and much to relinquish in our hierarchal structure built on a nearly apostolic succession model of power through position/title.

Mark 10:1-12

Jesus is asked about divorce. And if there is a topic more ripe for discussion and disagreement based on popular opinion verses Jesus' teaching, I'm not sure what it could be. We live in a culture that argues that romantic love (Greek: *eros*) forms the basis of marriage. But that means commitment need only be maintained as long as the romance remains alive. If *eros* is no longer experienced, then a partner concludes the marriage was a mistake and ends it. Even Christian marriages end at rates nearly equaling those outside.

Where does Jesus turn in scripture to support His contention that divorce is not His will? What practice in Judaism does it seem Jesus is addressing since He is speaking to men here?

Mark 10:13-16

Jesus loved kids! They were not lesser beings in His view, but filled with the love of life that He created. And it seems that they trusted Him as well. His appreciation is contrasted by the approach of the disciples who attempt to shield Jesus from their supposed intrusion.

What teaching about the Kingdom relates it to children? How did little children receive the kingdom of God?

Mark 10:17-31

One of the saddest stories in the gospels, this man who comes to Jesus and asks what He must do to inherit eternal life. The question is an odd one, though. The only requirement for real inheritance is to be a member of the family. But this man felt like an outsider, apparently. Jesus answer refers Him back to some specific commandments, which perhaps he feels he has kept (and maybe only outwardly). But there is insinuation he lacks in other areas. And the fact that he loves wealth and Jesus does not mention the 10th commandment hints at this, as well as the first table of the decalogue, including having no other gods before the Creator. The text says the man leaves sad because He has great wealth when Jesus invites him to relinquish all and follow.

Why do you suppose Jesus asked this man to give everything, but not Zacchaeus, or others such as Nicodemus? How much more poignant is this passage when we see contrasted Jesus' love for the man and the man's response in leaving sad?

Why is it so hard to set wealth aside in favor of God's kingdom? Why are the two often at odds with each other?

Mark 10:32-45

Once again, for the 3rd time in three chapters, Jesus predicts His death followed by his teaching on discipleship. This time, the foil for His lesson is the question of James (Jacob in the Greek) and John: can we sit on each side of you in the Kingdom. But Jesus tells them it's not His place to give.

Who was on Jesus' left and right when He became the King of the Kingdom of suffering? Would James and John have wanted to drink *that* cup if they knew what it contained?

What does Jesus say in vss. 42-45 regarding power and prestige? How does this apply to the church today?

Mark 10:46-52

One final healing story, and this time, Jesus heals a blind man without needing to heal twice! But Jesus has also hopefully cleared things up with His disciples, and hopefully they are seeing more clearly now themselves.

Closing Comments

The patience of Jesus with His disciples is rather encouraging. We are slow to understand the ways of God, and see the world through limited and tainted lenses. He longs to give us true 20/20 eyesight.

Opening Question

Would you rather live with no controversies or with them?

Introduction

Dr. Shepherd notes how this section adds controversies at the close of Jesus' ministry that parallel the beginning of his ministry. The "sandwich story" concept in Mark extends even to the macro-level of the narrative structure. Some have wondered if Mark knew that he was writing in these parallel forms, if it was his just a subconscious Hebrew way of thinking, or if it was a divine inspiration that created such order. Either way, the closing scenes in Mark depict Jesus once again in contention with the religious leaders. The greatest opposition to Jesus' ministry continues to be the leaders in Israel!

Mark 11:1-11

The quarterly takes time to show the link between the triumphal entry and the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9,10. Although Matthew's gospel makes this Old Testament connection, Mark does not mention it. Remembering Mark's audience may account for this (although Luke's gospel also does not reference fulfillment, either).

In Mark, Jesus is the powerful, wonder-working Son of God. This is shown in a couple ways: First, Jesus' supernatural *knowledge* of the colt and prophetic guidance to his disciples shows He knows things outside the realm of typical human knowledge. Second, the *taming and riding* of the unbroken colt is more a matter of His power than a reference to Jewish scriptures, with which the Greco-Roman audience would likely have been unfamiliar. The statement regarding the colt, "the Lord has need of it," has a divine connotations as the Greek word for Lord (*kurios*) means both "master" and the word used for God.

What prompted the crowds to begin the praising of Jesus? Why does Jesus now not try to hide from the crowds?

How do you relate the humility of the donkey with the obvious royal status afforded Jesus by the crowds?

Mark 11:12-26

Another sandwich story in Mark (#4), the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple are inextricable. They form chiasm:

Cursing of the fig tree
Cleansing of the Temple
Lessons from the fit tree

In both stories, Jesus is stirred up. At first glance, it appears Jesus is simply angry at the tree not bearing fruit, so curses it, but his anger at the temple desecration leads to him cleansing it. These actions are parallel, and the cursed fig tree is a living parable. Jesus has come to Israel, to the very temple seeking the fruit of righteousness and justice; but finding none, ultimately curses the tree, symbolizing His people. The cleansed temple indicates that only He can truly cleanse his temple (see 1 Corinthians 3 and 6 for further references to the N.T. concept of temple).

What areas of your life need cleansing? What fruit might God be looking for in us today (the church broadly) that we still have not born for Him?

Mark 11:27-33

Jesus is asked about the origin of His authority, but turns the question back on the chief priests, scribes, and elders of Jerusalem. He leaves them perplexed at how to respond; their problem is revealed by Mark: they cannot answer the question about the authority of John's baptism, so Jesus' answer would not be acceptable to them, either.

What was the Jewish leadership's real view of John and Jesus? What were the real motivating factors that led to their rejection of both John and Jesus?

Mark 12:1-12

The parable of the tenant farmers here links directly to the cursing of the fig-tree. The two must be read in their shared context of Jesus coming to His people seeking fruit. The song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 is the basis for this re-telling of a very old parable-song. Mark's story is a bit different from Matthew's, where Jesus draws the answer from his audience. In Mark, Jesus simply answers the question He himself poses: what will the vineyard owner do to those who failed to yield fruit? Destroy them and give the vineyard to others. Again, their fear of the people comes up, but they know he is speaking the parable against them, so they don't react against Jesus (yet!).

What privileges and responsibilities does the Christian church have that parallels that of Israel? Can Jesus take these from us and give them to others if we fail to bear fruit for Him? Or is His calling irrevocable?

Mark 12:13-27

In two confrontations Jesus' enemies seek to entrap Him: first the Pharisees and Herodians, second the Sadducees. Jesus evades both with wise and even shocking answers, in each case "answering well." (which will be noticed in the next story)

Should we pay taxes? Jesus points out the inscription of Caesar on coins; currency belongs to the one whose imprint is minted. Caesar can demand back what is His. But giving to God the things that are God's... About what or whom is this speaking? Is it not us? Do we not bear God's image on us?

How then, should we render to God what is His?

Concerning the resurrection, the Sadducees sought to place Jesus in a moral dilemma, and thus show the inconsistency of the resurrection doctrine. The fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still dead, but God is still their God indicates that there must, then, be a resurrection. Also, the Sadducees reject God's power; He is able to raise the dead, to change stony hearts to living ones, and to raise up from stones new children for Abraham.

In what way is the story of Abraham and Sarah having children in their old age a foreshadowing of resurrection in the Old Testament? Why does Jesus tell the Sadducees that they do not know the “power of God”?

Mark 12:28-34

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus links the *Shema*, Israel's key text for monotheism (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and devotion to God with Leviticus 18:19, which calls for love to our neighbors. The scribe agrees, becomes an ally to Jesus, and gives hope that even Jewish leaders are not beyond the Kingdom of God.

What does Jesus' statement to the Scribe imply: “you are not far from the Kingdom of God”? How do I know if I love God? What is the link between loving Him (vertical) and others (horizontal)?

Mark 12:35-40

Jesus now turns the tables and begins asking the tough questions. If the Pharisees believed that the Messiah was going to be “David's Son,” how then could David call Him “Lord” in Psalm 110:1? This is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament, and Jesus calls attention to its messianic implications.

Can our traditions or beliefs get in the way of seeing deeper meanings in Scripture?

Closing Comments

The chapter ends with a contrast between the Scribes, who loved respect, honor and attention, and a poor widow (12:41-44), whom Jesus commends for her true generosity and commitment. While the lesson separates these stories, they are tied, and lead to the discussion of the next lesson on the “last days.”

The controversies in the temple are leading to Jesus' ultimate rejection and death, yet he bore patiently with the people. How we respond when our views or ideas are confronted says a lot how we hold both our beliefs *and* how we feel about those confronting us. Jesus loved those who contended with Him, yet never altered his beliefs to accommodate their skepticism.

Opening Question

If you could know your whole future, would you do so?

Introduction

The future always captures our imagination. We worry about our own future and legacy, about our world and its sustainability, about our family and friends, and even about objects like our houses or collectibles. When asked about the future, Jesus tells His disciples the most significant aspects of *religious* history ahead of them, and the lessons that come from it. Mark 13 parallels Matthew 24-25 in some significant ways.

Mark 13:1-8

Shocked by Jesus' prophecy that the temple would be dismantled, Peter, Jacob (Greek name usually translated into English as *James* in honor of King James, a tradition continued to this day) and John ask Jesus to tell them two things: *When will this happen?* And *What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?* These are two separate questions, but Jesus intermixes His answer; for those seeking exact timing and precise signs, we are left with more questions than answers. Yet Jesus gives clues in the world around them in verses 5-8:

- False Messiahs deceiving people
- Wars
- Earthquakes
- Famines

These are said to be the beginning of "birth pangs."

Why would Jesus compare these world events to birth pangs? How are a pregnant woman's contractions and birthing similar to these signs?

Mark 13:9-13

The signs continue, but now focus on the disciple's mission and the world's reaction to the gospel proclamation. They could expect mistreatment, floggings, and yet opportunities to testify about Jesus. Even families would be torn apart by the gospel with close relations being those willing to kill.

Is it possible to follow Jesus fully and still please all people? What evidence might I have that I love my family more than God? How can I remain faithful to God if the world turns against me?

Mark 13:14-20

The *abomination of desolation* referred to in Daniel is now Jesus' focus. For Jesus, this event was still future. In Luke's gospel, the parallel is with the armies of Rome surrounding

Jerusalem. In Mark, while also being “Judea-focused,” it also links to a time of distress unequalled in the world, days that were cut short by God in His mercy, or no life would be saved. The unqualified superlatives used in vs. 19 suggest this to be the worst time of tribulation in history, and will not be surpassed in the future. But is this about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple’s fall? Or is it something else? Adventists have typically said “those days” of verse 19 were the dark ages of church apostasy, but Mark uses the words “those days” in vs. 17 referring to the disciple’s time.

Would it have been encouraging or discouraging to the disciples to know that their future included the worst possible trouble in history? How can/should they respond to this information? What lessons are their for us in the days ahead, days that may be filled with difficulty?

Mark 13:21-31

False Messiahs are mentioned again here, just before the actual sign(s) of Jesus’ return. This suggests that the arrival of the Messiah is always countered and impersonated by the evil one.

How can Jesus’ followers be safe from deception? What safeguards do we have assurance will protect us from being misled?

The actual sign of Jesus’ return is given in vs. 24-27. The signs in the sun, moon, and stars is an allusion to the Day of the Lord passages from the Old Testament, but verse 26 mentioning the coming of the son of man on the clouds appears to be from Daniel 7. There is only one sign that really points to Jesus’ return, and that is his arrival. The gathering of God’s people together with Christ has been the hope of all true disciples since the first advent!

If we cannot use the signs around us to be confident of the exact timing of Jesus’ return, then two questions become obvious: 1) what is the purpose of the signs Jesus’ gives? 2) how should we live while waiting for Christ’s return?

Mark 13:32-37

In many ways, vss. 32-37 answer the previous question, “how shall we live”? We should stay alert, always ready, because as vs. 33 reminds us, we do know when the appointed time will come.

The quarterly offers a couple ideas of how to interpret “this generation,” but another way to understand “this generation” is to see how Jesus uses the term “generation” in other places. When speaking about those looking for a sign as proof for faith, Jesus says “a wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign.” That has always been the case. Likewise, Jesus says in Matthew 23 that all the guilt of bloodshed would come on “this generation” that rejected Jesus, but *must* extend beyond the Pharisees and Scribes rebuked in that chapter. “This generation” more likely means a line or lineage of people. The Jews had become a generation of Satan rather than the line of Abraham.

What must we do to be part of “this generation” who sees these things take place, a generation that waits with expectation for Jesus’ return rather than with mocking or apathy?

Closing Comments

Mark 13 offers hope for us that Jesus will come again, but most of the chapter is less-than-rosy. Just as birth pains come on a pregnant woman, so will be the coming of Jesus. The great news is that a baby will be born! The new kingdom will arrive, and all things will be new. The travails of labor give way to the miraculous gift of new life!

Opening Question

Why do we sometimes distrust the court system to act justly?

Introduction

Chapter 14 of Mark begins with Jewish leaders plotting to take Jesus out, and ends with Him in handcuffs and facing a court charade. But these scenes also set up the fulfillment of Jesus' words to Peter about the denials. Jesus is mistreated but is also fulfilling the 3 predictions about His death in Chs. 8-10. Even in these difficult scenes, Jesus is only further showing His power.

Mark 14:1-2

The plot to kill Jesus again shows how fearful the leaders were of losing their power, and how precarious the position was. Publicly mistreating Jesus was religio-political suicide!

Mark 14:3-9

The home of Simon the Leper also is in Bethany, where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. Other gospels suggest that Simon is a Pharisee, and that Mary is the one anointing Jesus. Mark does not point these things out. It has been estimated that the woman anointing Jesus brings the modern equivalent of nearly a year's worker-wages worth of perfume, breaks the vial, and pours it *all* on Jesus' head. The room would be overcome with the smell. But it was the woman's gift-offering to Christ.

What is your most valuable possession? Would you be willing to part with it as a gift to God? Has He called you to give up something important?

Mark 14:10-11

The Pharisees now have an inside man. Judas is willing to betray Jesus for money. His role here is set off in distinct contrast with the woman who gives lavishly to Jesus. Judas' desire for wealth means that even Jesus, his friend, is not worth preserving.

Why is Judas' role an actual "betrayal"? Can Judas' role ever be seen in a positive light?

Mark 14:12-25

Jesus sends his disciples to find a room for their Passover meal, what will become the last for them, as Jesus is about to be taken away. The lesson, however, does not deal much with the challenge this verse has provided Bible scholars. It says it was the day of the Passover, but Jesus dies on the Passover, *the next day!* The most logical explanation is that it is evening on Thursday after the sun has set, the day for the Passover meal because Jews reckoned sunset to sunset as one day.

This meal includes:

1. A prediction of betrayal
2. The covenant meal of blood

The two accounts are again contrasting pictures: one person will give up integrity for money and betrayal of a friend, the Other will give His life for those He loves.

What are the parameters or requirements of the new covenant/relationship? How can the Lord's Supper be eaten today in a way that shows we remember and embrace this covenant?

Mark 14:26-42

Scenes from the Garden of Gethsemane are meant to draw us to Jesus' aloneness. Peter will deny Jesus, the sheep will be scattered, the disciples sleep instead of interceding for and with Jesus. During this time, Jesus prays that the cup will be taken from him. He has alluded to the cup of suffering in the discipleship teachings in chs. 8-10, when the brothers ask to sit on His left and right.

Jesus wanted His friends to pray with him for an hour, quietly at night, in a secluded forest spot. Are you more likely to find fault with the disciples (as Jesus does), or to understand their weakness and sleep? Or can you understand both? Why might this be?

Mark 14:43-52

The betrayal occurs as Judas hoped it would, but Jesus ends up again as the one whose prophetic word is true. Just as He had predicted the disciples scattering, now they do. Just as He predicted the betrayal, so Judas does. He even quotes the Old Testament to show how the arrest fulfills Jewish scripture.

One of the more interesting lines in the Bible, vss. 51-52 tell of a young man fleeing naked into the night. Nothing more is said about it, but some scholars believe this was John Mark himself following at a distance, perhaps he was related to one of the disciples.

Mark 15:53-72

Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus in the courtyard outside takes concurrently with Jesus' trial and mistreatment by the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Each is on trial: Jesus succeeds but Peter fails. False testimony is brought against Jesus, yet he does not fight it. Peter is presented with the truth, but he denies it. The contrast could not be more stark.

How would you respond if you were accused falsely? What would be your response if you faced the kind of pressure Peter faced? Can you envision a scenario where you would be embarrassed to be friends with Jesus Christ?

Closing Comments

Events leading to the crucifixion feel inevitable in Mark, and they are meant to. Jesus has predicted them, and they must occur. Yet Jesus does nothing Himself to cause them to happen; He does not accelerate their fulfillment. Even in this, His power is seen!

*Opening Question***Is the cross an appropriate symbol for Christianity?***Introduction*

Passion literature requires suffering, but not necessarily death. Jesus both suffers, and then dies in the Gospel account of Mark. The scenes are difficult to take in; perhaps for some, it can even be painful enough to read that they do not like to dwell on it. But face it we should, internalizing it draws us to the one suffering.

Mark 15:1-15

Pontius Pilate is known from Roman inscriptions, and some writings. He was not known as a reliable ruler, but when faced with the conundrum of Jewish riot vs. crucifying an innocent man, he fails his largest test. He is not ignorant, however, nor is he unwise to the Chief Priest's schemes (see vs. 10). Just as the Jewish leaders feared the crowds, so also Pilate desires to satisfy others. He releases Barabbas, then has Jesus scourged, and then hands him over to the crucifixion detail.

In our western desire for lawful justice, how does the trial before Pilate strike you? Can we understand the politics involved? If you were in Pilate's place, how would you respond?

Mark 15:16-20

Not only was Jesus truly the king of the Jews, but is now mocked as such in the purple robe (over his shredded, bleeding back), the crown (of thorns), and the fake obeisance and worship. He is beaten simply for sport now; the Romans have no reason to hurt him other than boredom and the spirit of Satan working through them all.

Mark 15:21-26

We have very few comments in Mark about the actual crucifixion, but victims were impaled to a wooden stake or stake with crossbeam, and left hanging painfully by nails or bound ropes. The chest begins to constrict, and suffocation makes exhaling impossible without relieving pressure on the chest. This requires standing up, and the body will do so in order to breath, forcing more pain on the feet and hands/arms. Crucifixion victims could take 3 or more days to die of suffocation from muscle exhaustion, every breath painful in every way. Jesus denies the "gift" of pain-killing myrrh/wine mixture; he felt it all.

People often say, "Jesus bore my penalty." Do we deserve the kind of death Jesus suffered? Does *anyone*? In what way, then, does Jesus die my death?

Mark 15:27-41

Although Mark is written with those unfamiliar with Judaism, he cannot avoid pointing to the Old Testament as scripture foretelling the suffering of the Messiah. The words of Jesus from

the cross, which Mark translates for his readers not knowing Aramaic, direct us to Psalm 22, as do references to those crying “save yourself,” and “he saved others, himself he cannot save.” But the vindication of Jesus’ identity is finally proclaimed both in the temple in the tearing of the veil, and in the mouth of the centurion who says (vs. 39), “surely this man was the son of God!” The non-Jewish audience is drawn in by the words of this soldier who witnessed Jesus’ demeanor, behavior, and death on the cross. Never had he seen a person not fight with every fiber of being against death, and those who sought his death.

What does the cross tell us about the depths to which sinful people will go against God (since, after all, Jesus *is* God!)? What does it show us about the character of God (since, again, Jesus *is* God)?

What does Mark want us to feel and experience as we read these closing scenes of Jesus’ life? Should *your* life be different for us because of what Jesus did here?

Closing Comments

Final hours of Jesus life are difficult to contemplate. And it should appall us. But we consider what Jesus endured in order to make this new covenant in His blood and broken body. The cross is not the symbol of life, but of Roman torture.

Opening Question

If Jesus rose from the dead as the Gospel of Mark says, what impact does that have on us today?

Introduction

The good news of the resurrection is recounted briefly in Mark, but still climactically. Main characters shift from the disciples to the women and Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, and a “young man in white.” These characters mark a shift in the story to uncertainty, yet promises new things.

Mark 15:42-47

Mark locates the timing of Jesus’ death to Friday, the preparation day before the Sabbath. He also notes that Joseph of Arimathea provides a tomb for Jesus. One of the most important verses for modern scholarship regarding the resurrection accounts is vs. 47. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see specifically where Jesus was laid. They knew the place, and when returning on Sunday morning, they would have known the location. Many secular scholars attempt to set aside the resurrection suggesting the disciples came to the wrong tomb early in the morning. But this verse says otherwise!

Why would it take courage for Joseph to face Pilate? And why would Pilate (vs. 44) be incredulous that Jesus would already be dead?

Mark 16

In chapter 16, the first couple verses, we see the women arrive at the tomb, but here some of the story is only parts of that found in the other gospels. The focus is that the stone was already rolled away, and a “young man wearing white” was sitting at the right side. They are told to go announce that Jesus was risen. Yet they are afraid!

Why would the women be scared to tell that Jesus was alive? How does this commission to announce Jesus publicly contrast with the messianic secret found throughout the rest of the book?

If women were divinely commissioned first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, where does that place the role of women today in proclamatory ministry?

The oldest Manuscripts of Mark do not contain vss. 9-20. But here are the options for the four endings of Mark’s gospel.

1. Ending at vs. 8. With this ending, the women are afraid to tell the disciples what they had heard and seen at the tomb. It is likely the most original ending, and fits the irony of the Messianic secret!

2. The added ending in vss. 9-20 (added in most Bibles after a line-break and a notation that these verses are not in the oldest Manuscripts of Mark) They are NOT found in Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, two of the earliest MSS of Mark. The content includes:
 - o Appearance to Mary Magdalene: vs. 9-11
 - o Appearance to two others: vs. 12-13
 - o Appearance to the 11, and commissioning: vs. 14-18
 - o Ascension: vs. 19
 - o Proclamation: vs. 20

These stories appear to be summaries of Luke and Acts, and so are really repetitions of material already found in the gospels. And yet...

- Justin Martyr (AD 160) seems to refer to this ending
- Martyr's student, Tatian (c. 172), includes it in his Gospel harmony
- Irenaeus (c. 184) cites Mark 16:19
- These "Patristic" sources are older than the oldest surviving MS of Mark

3. The shorter ending, found in only 6 Greek MSS (Several uncials from 7th-9th cent.)

"But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

4. Finally, the *Freer Logion*, an insertion into the longer ending between vss. 14-15, is only found in one Greek Manuscript, but it's fairly early: Codex Washingtonianus (late 300s)

"And they excused themselves, saying, 'This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits [or, does not allow what lies under the unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]. Therefore reveal your righteousness now' – thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, 'The term of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, in order that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness that is in heaven.'"

Can we trust the Biblical accounts even if we may not have full assurance that it was authentic and original? Do we have enough evidence for faith?

Closing Comments

Mark's gospel concludes with the amazing yet hard-to-believe message that the tomb was empty. It is a message that leaves the reader hungry for more, most likely giving rise to the additional ending added for "completeness," yet ruining the irony. The good news is that Jesus is alive, that disciples are to bear this message to the world, and that the wonder-working Jesus is there for us today, and has promised to return!

